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Action Taken

FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

TO : AMEMBASSY, GUATEMALA

1026
DESP. NO.

: THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

May 22, 1953
DATE

Date of Action 5-26-53

: F790001-1261

Action Office MAY 23 1953

Name of Officer

Disposition to DC/R

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SUBJECT: Joint Weeka No. 21 for State, Army and Air Departments from S - Section I

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JUL 1 1953

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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MESSAGE CENTER

Guatemala's powerful railway workers' union SAMF was torn by dissension when a faction led by the non-Communist but unscrupulous Arturo MORALES Cubas set up a rival Executive Committee after failing to unseat the existing pro-Communist Executive Committee headed by Aristeo SOSA Jr. in a riotous general meeting on May 15. This dissension may readily cause further postponements in negotiations with the IRCA Railway for a new collective contract.

In the foreign field, Dr. Raúl OSEGUEDA, the Foreign Minister, denied press reports that Guatemala had entered into an agreement with Mexico to control Communist infiltration. In accepting a decoration from the Cuban Government, Dr. Osegueda, with singular blindness to Guatemala's own sensitivity to foreign criticism, made pointed allusions to Cuban domestic politics.

LABOR

The internal bickering within the railway workers' union SAMF recently became so violent as to threaten the organization's effective unity. On May 15 a dissident group led by Sr. Arturo Morales Cubas set up a new Executive Committee in opposition to the old one headed by Sr. Aristeo Sosa Jr. This action followed a tumultuous general meeting at which Sr. Sosa, who presided, claimed a majority of the delegates had voted to uphold his leadership whereas this ruling was disputed by the Morales Cubas faction who stayed in the meeting hall after Sr. Sosa's group had left and put through their slate of officials. Since then, both sides have actively sought to gain the recognition of the Government Labor Office and support among the union's branches. The large local at Puerto Barrios and smaller groups at Zacapa and Mazatenango

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are reported to have voted to accept the new pro-Morales Cubas Committee headed by Sr. Gonzalo GUTIERREZ, while the large majority of the important Escuintla branch is reported to favor Sr. Sosa.

The Communist-versus-anti-Communist aspect of this struggle is important but not necessarily determining. Sr. Sosa and most of his group are regarded as pro-Communist and have the backing of the Communist-dominated General Labor Federation CGTG and the far-left political party PAR. In contrast, Sr. Morales Cubas has in times past publicly attacked the Communists in the labor movement and is a political associate of Sr. Augusto CHARNAUD MacDonald, Minister of Interior and Secretary General of the more moderate pro-Government party PRG. Morales Cubas' influence has been somewhat weakened by the discovery last year of serious irregularities in his management of the SAMF Consumers' Cooperative (Weeka No. 39, 1952). It is charged that his efforts to gain control of the SAMF are connected with the presidential aspirations of Sr. Charnaud MacDonald. Hence, ideological lines are blurred and personal advancement may well be the primary consideration of the leaders.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Dr. Raúl Osegueda, Guatemalan Foreign Minister, on May 16 denied press reports from Mexico City that Mexico and Guatemala had entered into an agreement to take measures against the infiltration of Communists from one country to the other. He branded the publication of such reports an example of the tactics of the local independent press to create difficulties for the Government. He was reported to have said that under Guatemala's "complete democracy" it would be impossible to limit the movements of persons "said to be Communists".

Continuing its distribution of decorations in an apparent effort to enlist the good will of Guatemalan officials and thus to insure against the use of Guatemalan territory as a base for revolutionary expeditions, the Cuban Ambassador conferred the Order of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes on Foreign Minister Osegueda on May 20, Cuba's national holiday. In accepting this distinction, Dr. Osegueda indulged in scarcely veiled criticisms of political conditions in Cuba, saying that he welcomed President Batista's announcement that the people would soon be allowed to decide their own fate and expressing the hope that Cuba would resume its guiding role "in this dark night which seemingly encompasses so many sister nations of America".

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In recent times, the Cuban Government has conferred decorations, among others, on President Arbenz; Col. Carlos E. DIAZ, Chief of the Armed Forces; Col. José A. SANCHEZ, Minister of Defense; and Col. Enrique PARINELLO, Chief of Staff.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

A reported project to revise the laws governing radio broadcasting drew fire during the week from the independent newspapers El Imparcial and La Hora which charged that the authorities intended to put an end to freedom of expression on the radio and institute rigorous censorship. The controversy began when Sr. Francisco BAEZA A., editor of an independent radio news program, published a series of three articles in La Hora beginning May 19 declaring that the proposed law would require filing copy with the Ministry of Communications twelve hours before broadcast time, a requirement which in Sr. Baeza's opinion would constitute a death sentence for radio newscasts. El Imparcial in leading editorials on May 19 and May 21 deplored the repressive tendencies of Government officials and urged the maintenance of full Constitutional guarantees to prevent Guatemala's slipping back into dictatorship.

Attention has been focused on the maintenance of democratic liberties since the Communist Secretary General of the General Confederation of Labor (CGTG), Sr. Víctor Manuel GUTIERREZ, who is also a deputy in Congress, advocated freedom for the people but not for the enemies of the people in his May Day address (Weeka No. 19). The independent press has recently charged that the authorities brought pressure on a radio station owner to force the suspension of a news program hostile to the Government, but a clear issue did not emerge from these allegations.

Also indicative of the thought in extreme leftist pro-Government circles was the publication in Nuestro Diario on May 15 of an attack on U.S. press wire services. The editorial said the press wire services showed marked hostility towards peoples and governments which respected popular liberties and attributed this attitude to the agencies' desire to defend the privileges of vested United States business interests against the efforts of "democratic" governments to curtail them.

R. E. Schoenfeld

Rudolf E. Schoenfeld

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